

# LETTERS *to the Editor*

## On Polluting the Biosphere

*To the Editor:* I agree completely with your editorial on "Polluting the Biosphere." (Calif. Med., 110:350-351, April 1969.)

It's a national disgrace that one of our Great Lakes is stinking and dead from man's careless pollution. We are messing our nest, intolerably.

The medical profession is in a unique position to educate and pressure local communities to take effective pollution control action. This is clearly a health matter, and I have found that the "MD" carries weight in discussing environmental quality.

The technology for pollution control is available. What is lacking is public awareness and determination to clean our nest. Here, the medical profession has been as lazy as everyone.

There are new federal and state anti-pollution laws, but much control remains at the hometown level. If the local community does not act, the state and federal controls come into effect.

Doctors talk a lot about the encroachment of "Big Government" into medical matters. Here's a chance for them to DO something — to take action on a local matter before the state and federal authorities move in.

Do you think "pollution nuts" are just a bunch of alarmists? If so, try on for size the writings of Dr. LaMont C. Cole, Cornell biologist. Remember how great big important Man depends completely on a lot of tiny plants for life? Remember photosynthesis and nitrogen cycles? Ponder these thoughts of Dr. Cole, next time you doctors wonder why you should care about all this stuff:

A type of ocean algae, marine diatoms [Dr. Cole says] "produce some 70 percent of the earth's annual supply of oxygen. . . . If we should inad-

vertently kill enough marine diatoms or the organisms they depend on for fixed nitrogen, we should start running out of oxygen to breathe. Yet these organisms are now being exposed to our half million chemicals. There is evidence that the insecticide DDT can suppress photosynthesis in bodies of water. . . .

"More frightening yet to me [Cole] are the herbicides or 'weed killers'—chemicals specifically designed to be poisonous to plants. At present the military is taking most of our production of these chemicals and shipping it to Vietnam to kill rice and defoliate jungle vegetation. What will happen if a few tankers loaded with concentrated herbicides are sunk in the Pacific? . . ."\*

We won't need a nuclear holocaust to finish us off.

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## Induced Abortion and the Law

*To the Editor:* "Wider public knowledge" of the lethal danger of gas embolus in induced abortion is urged by Dr. Lester T. Hibbard in your April issue.

As one with some experience in disseminating public knowledge and examining its effects, may I suggest that all the knowledge in the world will not keep desperate women from visiting criminal abortionists or attempting self-induced abortions.

Only a new orientation in the law's philosophy will prevent these needless deaths, and that philosophy must recognize the right of any woman to bear a child or not to bear one. Anything less, including California's so-called "liberalized" abortion law, denies this fundamental right to women and limits the right of physicians to practice their profession with unfettered concern for the total health of their patients.

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\*Dr. Cole's quotation taken from "Man and the Air," Population Bulletin Number 5, December 1968, published by the Population Reference Bureau, Inc., 1755 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.